

Olympic silver dollars get off to false start

By Roger Boye

When the first Olympic silver dollars rolled off the production line during ceremonies in San Francisco, a top government bureaucrat declared the coins to be works of beauty.

But woops! After a more careful look, experts discovered that the 1983-dated commemoratives weren't so lovely after all. Production problems had marred parts of the design on both sides, creating fresh problems for the sometimes controversial coin program.

Mint Director Donna Pope said the flaws were barely visible, but "the tradition of excellence for U.S. proof coins" could not be lowered. Accordingly, officials ordered government workers to destroy hundreds of the first-struck pieces.

Technicians are adjusting the coin dies so that high points of the designs—such as in the feathers of the eagle depicted on the tails side—will properly "strike up." But the changes mean that most buyers won't receive their 1983 silver dollars until May or June, nearly three months behind schedule. [The 1984 silver dollar and \$10 gold piece will be produced and shipped next year, of course.]

Meanwhile, officials have sold about 860,000 Olympic coins—out of the 52 million they are authorized to make—since sales began last July. Committees organizing the 1984 Los Angeles summer Olympics have received about \$14.7 million from the coin proceeds so far; if all the coins are sold, the Olympics would net \$600 million.

● Today begins National Coin Week for 1983, the period each year when collectors are allowed to boast publicly about the world's greatest hobby. U.S. Rep. Frank Annunzio [D., Ill.] is one of two honorary chairmen of the observance, in recognition of his efforts in promoting coin-week legislation in Congress.

● Undaunted by the failure of the Susan B. Anthony dollar in this country, the British government will begin Thursday to circulate a £1 coin made with nickel and brass. The piece is the first with a £1 value issued for circulation since 1914.

The British Royal Mint is selling the coin to U.S. collectors as part of proof and uncirculated coin sets. For information, write to the mint in care of Barclays Bank of New York, N.A., P.O. Box 2570, New York, N.Y. 10163, or call, toll-free during business hours, 800-221-1215.

The British mint also has struck a commemorative crown [50 pence] dated 1983 that honors the 150th anniversary of the Falkland Islands as a British crown colony. A silver specimen costs \$49 and the cupro-nickel coin costs \$5.75, with a minimum order of \$11.50.